DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 374 HE 010 705

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TITLE Implications of Giving Women a Greater Share of Academic Decision-Making.
PUB DATE 8 Mar 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at Conference on Expanding the Role of Women in the Sciences, New York Academy of Sciences (March 6-8, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Personnel; *Administrator Selection; *College Administration; Decision Making; Educational Administration; *Females; *Feminism; Higher Education; Interpersonal Competence; *Leadership; Power Structure; Recruitment; Role Models

ABSTRACT

Viewpoints about women in academic leadership roles were obtained from women administrators and experts on women in power in academe. Data cited indicate that there are few women at the top. Cultural practices like sports have influenced men to need to win; women acquire interpersonal skills and learn to achieve their ends by less direct means than men. Women also tend to simplify things since they have learned to devise short cuts that work. The ability to ask good, fresh questions and to seek answers to them through channels not commonly used is part of what makes women good on committees. Women in leadership positions provide role models for students. It is valuable for men as well as women to see women achieving. The first problem in appointing women to top positions is to find the women. Internships and training programs are essential, but expensive. An on-the-job approach might be helpful. There must be a willingness to identify able women and to give them support on the job and job security. Women who have top positions must bring other women in. Women must learn to understand the ways of power, which is diffuse, or distributive, in academe. (SW)

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IMPLICATIONS OF GIVING WOMEN A GREATER SHARE OF ACADEMIC DECISION-MAKING

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What are the implications? Will there be more women in academic postions where they can have some influence on the course of their institutions? Why should the universities and colleges be interested in women as administrators? Aren't they interested solely in quality, and isn't quality independent of gender? Do women administrators have anything special to offer to the institution, to the students or to faculty or staff by virtue of their being female? Are women being deprived because there are so few of them in the top positions, and isn't this perhaps not so much a consequence of prejudice but the way the women themselves want things? Do women administrators have any influence on the curriculum? Are women capable of making the hard decisions on budgets and personnel? Do women work as hard as men? Are their careers in administration as important to them? Is leadership a proper role for women? Where does power lie in the university, and can women utilize this power for the good of the institution?

These are some of the questions that occurred to me when I was asked to speak on this topic. I am a scientist by profession, a plant physiologist who is fascinated by the intricacies of the biophysics of light absorption and utilization in the process of photosynthesis. I have had many of the difficulties and frustrations which are experienced by women scientists in general. My career as a researcher was sidetracked

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five years ago when I took on the job of being the grantsperson at San Jose State University, seemingly the only professional route open to me at the time within reasonable distance from home. I reported to the graduate dean, a woman who was and is an excellent administrator; she is now the university's executive vice president and served as an admirable example of what could be. I have just now returned to full-time teaching but remain interested in women as administrators. There are so few women in positions of real influence that each must pretty much establish her own style. Thus I have carried out a preliminary probing by talking with a number of women - each of them quite remarkable - on the questions I raised at the outset. While some generalizations are inevitable, I cannot present them as research findings which will stand up under scrutiny. The women who spoke freely with me shall remain nameless for the most part, but they are presidents, former presidents, vice-presidents, deans, sociologists, anthropologists and others, each in some way an expert on women in power in academe. They come from institutions in all parts of the country, public and private, large and small, women's colleges and large state universities.

First of all, there are very few women at the top. There are fewer than fifty women college presidents out of a total of over 3,000 presidencies in this country (1). The proportion is scarcely greater for executive or academic vice presidents or academic deans. And, in the words of Patricia Albjerg Graham, "Discussions about the status of women in higher education have become as contagious as cholera and just about as popular with predominantly male faculties and administration." (2) Colleges and universities have not taken a leading role in changing this situation, at least not so you'd notice it. In order to reach an average of thirty percent women in administrative positions by 1990, universities would have to maintain as a whole a proportion among women new hires of fifty percent. (1) But the species - woman administrator - does exist, and let

us assume that their proportion will increase through efforts such as the American Council of Education (ACE) National Identification Program, and the active efforts of women who are administrators, and of course those men who can see through the cultural stereotypes to the abilities women have.

At this point, I'd like to say that neither I nor any of the women with whom I conferred asserted that women have any physical or physiological characteristics that render them intrinsically superior to men when it came to being administrators. Nor is anyone forgetting that there are men with all the qualities that I am proposing are valuable in an administrator. However, the nurture of women is very different from that of men and results on the whole in rather different kinds of people. These differences can be of great value to the institution. Note that administer means "minister to" and has quite a different connotation from manage. (3)

Why should a college or university have any interest in increasing the number of women in academic administration? A call for equity is not particularly compelling in a time of declining enrollments, decreasing budgets, demands from the Federal government for ever more numerous and expensive reporting and compliance procedures. Universities are in trouble on many counts, and although there are a lot of intelligent people in the universities, those in the decision making roles are almost all pale males and they need some of the fresh ideas, energy and creativity that women have. The men have been brought up in a remarkably uniform kind of culture, and they are in the same position as inbred crops (my biological parallel there) - terrific producers when the climate is exactly right, but vulnerable when times are tough or changing. A decrease in the homogeneity of the university will provide the hope of opening up alternative solutions. The universities need a substantial infusion from those people who are now

just on the periphery of influence, and this includes minorities as well as women. Bernice Sandler remarked that the Peter Principle didn't apply to women because because they hadn't had a chance to rise to the level of their incompetence,(4) so that at any given level of responsibility, the men had risen to the level of their incompetence but the women hadn't, so the women seemed to be far more capable. The men who were their equals in ability had long since been promoted upwards.

Men have been brought up with a tradition of sports, of military games, of the absolute necessity of winning (and the utter shame of losing). In some situations this is no doubt a valuable background to have, and it is carried through to adult life in many ways. On the other hand, women acquire special skills in interpersonal relationships, and learn to achieve their ends by less direct means. They are sensitive to the emotional state of those with whom they deal. They are trained as diplomats from the cradle and they learn early to redefine issues so that they may be viewed from a fresh perspective and find that differences may be thus resolved. When defeat comes, a woman is more able to accept it gracefully, and often that is the most constructive action possible. Of course, I am not describing every woman, but a rather special type who will be of great help to any institution who is struggling with problems common to many of them these days.

Women tend to simplify things. All institutions (not just those of higher education) are terribly bound up in bureaucracies and seemingly unavoidable convoluted procedures of Byzantine complexity. Not knowing that a given set of procedures is "the way it is done" (and therefore sacred) women can take a fresh look and suggest short cuts in many situations when they are given the authority to do so. Women in all types of jobs, even at

the top professional levels, more often than not have responsibilities at home. They've learned to devise short cuts that work. Several of the women with whom I spoke recounted the difficulty of getting some segments of the instituions they had recently taken over the leadership of to adopt a more direct and simple way of dealing with a recurring problem. Once accomplished, the improvement was obvious. In most of life's tasks, the process isn't particularly interesting, but the result is necessary or desirable; getting the dinner on every night is a case in point.

Women are also more willing to ask "dumb questions" and sometimes find out that in a group of men, no one else knew the answer either but no one was willing to reveal that he didn't know. The male ego makes it hard to admit ignorance.

Then there's the matter of keeping cool. The professional woman, the woman administrator, simply must never lose her composure. No matter how emotional she might feel, she must contain herself. Yet a man can blow up, yell, rage, march out of the room, and the next day everything is normal again. He seemingly doesn't lose respect or authority when this happens, it is just taken in stride as part of his style. No one ever says, he's behaving just like a woman. Women don't behave like that, and yet emotional behavior is attributed to them. It is really just the other way around. In the words of Patricia Albjerg Graham, "Men are permitted their idiosyncracies of whatever sort, but women are expected to maintain a much more precarious balance between conspicuous confidence and tactful feminity." (2)

The ability to ask good, fresh questions and to seek answers to them through channels which are not those used most commonly is part of what makes women so good on committees. A committee chaired by a woman of some

skill and experience is likely to accomplish its task in an expeditious manner. Committee work consists of a series of compromises as the group moves towards its goal, and the skilled chair must keep the group moving with minimum abrasion, letting most members feel that their inputs have been an integral part of the group's accomplishment. Time and agin I've watched a skilled, low-key woman make suggestions that were later taken up by others as their own and which proved to be the resolution of the problem. She has long since learned not to press for recognition in an egocentric way, but takes her satisfaction from the accomplishment of the group. Isn't this another womanly attribute? Women are expected to be this way. In an institution where a great deal of the work of running the place is done not by fiat or by the overt exercise of authority, but by a network of committees, aren't these among the skills the instituion needs most? The characteristics that make us women are the characteristics that are the least valued by society, yet they might be those of most value to the institution.

Are women good at decision-making? Do they have a special style? Most of those with whom I spoke answered yes to both of these questions. In fact, they felt that women administrators are as good as the best men, and better than most. Since much decision making rests on a prior agreement on goals, the skills of women about which I've been talking have great value here. As one president in a large state system wrote to me, "I have not had any problems with the decision-making process, but some of my male faculty members do have problems."

Women who have risen to positions of responsibility in academe are extraordinarily conscious of quality and excellence and impatient with sloppiness, mediocrity or drift. They tend to be more uncompromising, intolerant of decisions made by default. The kind of decision that must be made at the top echelon is apt to be a difficult one, with no easy outs,

and of the kind that is likely to leave all parties somewhat dissatisfied, or some parties bitter. Although one woman president felt that there was no difference in the way men and women made the difficult decisions, such as those on budget or in personnel situations, most were emphatic in their belief that women were superior to many men administrators in dealing with them. At the same time, they were likely to be humane in rendering these decisions, helping as they could in sparing the feelings of those whose egos were involved, and careful that no lasting animosities were left.

There is a general opinion among the women administrators that women were on the whole harder working than men. Any person at the top has to have unusual reserves of energy, and the woman in high gear can be truly remarkable. It may be the result of the rather stringent selection that goes on - so few women get to the top that only the extraordinarily energetic one makes it there. Part of what drives her is a determination that no one be able to say that she was too weak or frail for the job. In addition, women are brought up to handle a variety of jobs more or less simultaneously. Most administrators complain that it is difficult or impossible to put in sustained work on any one matter, since the nature of the job is to fragment effort. However, a woman who has made it into administration has learned to juggle a lot of different things and I think that here, again, a woman's lifelong skills stand her in good stead.

Let me now turn to the effect on the students of seeing a woman in a leadership position. Without any doubt, every woman in a visible spot has enormous effect on the aspirations of the young women in that insitution, and in others too. I remember how excited my daughter was when she found out that a <u>woman</u> was president of the coeducational state college she attended. I don't think anything I had said or done h[illegible]early that impact on her. This president was not only intelligent and capable, but approachable

and she had "class". Young women without role models in responsible positions can conceive of their futures only in terms of somewhat limited ambitions. In most institutions, it is the "work" of a few men (especially in the more scholarly and prestigeous institutions) which becomes a sacred value in whose name numbers of women are expected to serve. As Adrienne Rich has pointed out, "the structure of the man-centered university constantly reaffirms the use of women as means to the end of male "work", meaning male careers and professional success."(5) Those women who do rise to the top seem to be able to get along with much less of a retinue.

It is in this connection that the woman's college is enormously valuable. These colleges have a greater number of women in administrative position, in faculty and so on. Women students in particular need to see these role models. (The men have always had plenty of role models.) There are no subjects which are reserved for men, there are no functions in the academy which require that the person who does them be a man. Yet in the large coeducational college, a woman top administrator is viewed as an aberration. A markedly disproportionate number of the women in the top ranks of academe came up through a woman's college. (6) At these institutions, the faculties have, on the average, 45 percent women, whereas at coeducational instituions the average is around 20 percent, and at men's colleges 8 percent or less. This means that the student at a woman's college has before her a wide range of and substantial number of women role models. The message is powerful; high achievement really is possible for women, and they <u>can</u> move up the career ladder. Moreover, women who teach in women's colleges rate themselves fairly high in self-esteem. Contrast this with the situation in the State University of New York, where 51 percent of the 375,000 students are women, but only three academic vice presidents in 72 units happen to be women, and one president who is acting. In the

California State University and College system which is almost as large with 275,000 students, there are no women presidents, although there is one woman vice-chancellor.

The value of mentors is generally recognized and yet how hard it is for a woman to find a mentor in situations such as these. True, it is possible for a woman to have a man as mentor, but there are often problems in this kind of relationship and it remains much more difficult for a woman than for a man to have this kind of help in entering realms of real responsibility.

It is not only valuable for women to see women achieving, it is important for men. Young men are rather used to having young women as their equals, but as they get older they move up a career ladder and eventually join their elders as equals. But the women lag behind, and the older woman generally remains in a subservient role. Her former buddies are now her bosses. A man who has experienced a competent woman in high position may have his whole perception of women altered, and for the better. He may be better able to think of his wife as a partner and his equal, and more tolerant of the aspirations that women are putting into effect in every area of American life today. Tidball puts it very well: "For women to develop non-biological competence, there must first be the expectation that such competency can exist." She goes on to write, "...true liberation requires a mutuality of respect, acceptance, and approbation in nonsexual terms, that is mutual interdependence." (7)

I think that we still have a long way to go before men are generally aware of the fact that women can function as administrators, or can exert any influence for that matter. As an illustration, I am currently chairing

a university committee to choose candidates for dean of the School of Engineering. We have just finished the preliminary screening of some 80 applicants, all men. (I'm sorry to say I was unable to presuade any of the qualified women I could find to apply!) These eighty presumably all want the job, and yet not a single one of them made any allusion to the possibility that women could become engineers, even though I think it might have occurred to a few of them that I (my name was on all the advertisements) might have had some interest in the cause of women engineers.

It seems obvious that universities and colleges will serve their own interests well by appointing women to top positions with greatest possible speed and in large numbers. Are there problems in doing so? The first problem is to find the women. There is no denying that the pool is small, for many reasons, among them the Peter Principle I mentioned earlier. It probably isn't possible to find women who have had just the right kind of experience, not only in dealing with people, but in dealing with budgets, raising money, in understanding physical plants and the rest of the nitty gritty of running the place. So the institutions must start immediately to consciously give women the opportunity to learn these things. Many men learn these things by doing them. I predict that there will be no dearth of women willing and anxious to gain the skills that lead to power. This will mean breaking down sexual stereotyping which permeates every institution, but especially the coeducational and men's schools. Internships and training programs are essential, but expensive, and an on-the-job approach might go far provided there is a genuine interest on the part of men in getting women who can really help run things. There must be a willingness to try to identify able, ambitious and energetic women, to give them support on the job, and enough security so that they are not washed up when they make the first mistake. There is a great tendency, apparently irrestistable for many men, to watch and wait when a woman has been given some responsibility for her to make some sort of blooper, and then to say with great satisfaction,

"Just like a woman!". So for a woman to succeed, those around her, both women and men, must want her to succeed, and make sure she gets the information she needs to do the job well. This type of woman might just be the one who makes a great contribution because since she has not come up the traditional system she doesn't share the same values and perceptions. She can be innovative because she doesn't know any better. There aren't many real leaders in higher education because most administrators are not really able to see that there's another way of doing something.

What other tactics will work well in getting women into administration? Women who have top positions must take it as their special duty to bring other women in, which is not to exclude men from this responsibility. If women do not provide strong support, that provides men with an excuse for not doing so. Women can be appointed to acting positions, and then they have a better shot at the permanent job. Women must be appointed to search committees and other personnel committees such as those involved with retention, promotion and tenure in numbers enough to exercise influence and to make sure that qualified women are actively sought out.

What difficulties face women administrators because they are women? Cynthia Fuchs Epstein has noted that decision-making in the top echelons is characterized as being highly informal, and that the presence of women disturbs that easy informality. (8). The woman administrator calls this the "locker-room problem" or the "men's room problem". Of course the men's room can be the golf course or lunch at the club. It is a frustrating situation, and was referred to by almost all the women administrators who operated in a largely male milieu. One's only defense is to insist on rather formal decision-making procedures, and to inform people that business is not going to be conducted in inaccessible places.

One of the results of having more women in higher education administration is the broadening of the base for women and a weakening of the old boy's network. / One concrete example of a probable effect of a woman at the top is cited by Mina Rees (President Emeritus of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, former President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the recipient of seventeen honorary degrees) in a report to the American Council on Education. While she was president of the Graduate School, there was a significantly higher proportion of women admitted and women completing the Ph.D. both with greater success and greater speed than was typical of graduate students. She points out that there were other factors which could have contributed to this result, such as the convenient location, allowing women with family responsibilities to handle them more easily, such as New York is a good place for women, and so on. (Personal communication). But it seems to me highly probable that in addition to these considerations, women realized that in an institution which was headed by a woman, they were pretty likely to get fair and unprejudiced treatment. Getting a Ph.D. is a very personal thing, and can be much influenced by the unfair practices of an individual. Such practices were bound to be minimal at CUNY Graduate School under President Rees.

Another possible result might be a shift in curriculum. The contributions of women might become truly integrated into the humanities courses and those of science to a greater extent as women assume responsible roles.

Then there's the matter of power. One of my conversants cynically said that any role in society into which women were allowed to move had no power, no matter what the title might be. Several of the men presidents, chancellors and deans I know complain that their positions don't hold any power, that they are just functionaries without any real influence despite the impressive titles and stately garb. Power in the universities is legally in the hands of the boards of trustees whence it flows to the top administrators, but a good administrator doesn't exercise that power. If he does, he'll have a mutiny. What he - or she - must do is to constantly delegate it, to work with groups who have appropriate responsibilities. Power is a matter of synthesizing on the highest level. Women must learn to understand the ways of power, which is diffuse, or distributive in academe. Once they understand it, their talents for gaining personal support and for getting people to pull together should stand them in good stead. In a state system, it's the legislature who has the purse strings, and then the trustees. Women in these bodies can be a great help (and we must get them there!) and the woman administrator must learn to cultivate them and work with them, and to keep them aware of the important functions and missions and problems of the universities. On the CSUC Board of Trustees, there are several women and they display a genuine concern and regard for the faculty and students which is generally lacking in the men on the board. Women board members bring a sense of human dignity and rights, a sense of humane concern to the whole enterprise.

What are the personal satisfactions and rewards for the woman administrator? I asked several women presidents if they enjoyed their jobs - they did. Several who were not yet presidents had plans for moving up.

A fascinating study of men and women in graduate administration revealed that significantly more women than men felt that the rewards of the leadership role were the most important aspects of the administrative role: being able to influence policy decisions, the pleasure of being able to carry plans to fruition, problem solving, and so on. Women gave responses indicating that they enjoyed the exercise of authority and the opportunity for leadership significantly (at the 99th percentile!) more often than men (9).

I'm convinced that the more women administrators there are, the better will be the academy and the society it serves. The qualities which are intrinsic to women are the qualities which are most needed by our universities today. As we move towards a woman-centered university, the greatest beneficiary will be the university itself. The talents of distinguished women teachers and researchers will be fostered, the aspirations of women will be raised, and the vision of all will be broadened.

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